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# THE PROFESSOR VERSUS THE PASTOR

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*It is highly desirable that the office of the pastor be not depreciated. The following article is a timely and vigorous presentation of the relation of the pastor to scholarship. The distinctions it makes are vital. If the minister is to treat his church as a class, he is bound to find that he will be tempted to substitute illumination for inspiration. He can well be scholarly, but he need not be a "scholar."*

The professor and the pastor, in the sphere of religion to which this article is limited, stand related as teacher and pupil. The pastor is indebted to the professor for training in the knowledge of church history, biblical literature, theological doctrine, and theories of making sermons. This indebtedness may be frankly acknowledged. Because of this relation it is assumed by some that the subjects and the methods of study on the part of the professor and the pastor are the same. Therein lies a mistake which may lead the professor to think that he is to guide the reading and the study of the pastor all his life and which may induce the pastor to attempt the methods of the professor.

"Once in so often" the theological journals and the religious papers publish a list of the most recent books (which is well), insisting that the pastor *ought* to read them (which is not well). Sometimes there is a lamentation that the pastor is neglecting the most recent scientific literature, thereby leaving himself uninformed and his people unfed.

One who, like the writer, just escaped becoming a professor (whether to his own gain or to the gain of a seminary is no matter) may be assumed to have had

sufficient hunger to desire knowledge and sufficient application to have acquired some. One who has spent his life in the exacting duties of pastoral work in a city parish may be assumed to know something of a pastor's needs. I happened at one time, without any intention of becoming a medical doctor, to pursue certain scientific studies in a medical college. Later in life I was thrown much with practicing physicians in a hospital. I noticed that the methods of the hospital were very unlike the methods of the medical college.

The same thing is true in the relation of the theological college and the church. The former is analytic and scientific, the latter is curative and inspirational. A professor of history, for example, is concerned with what has occurred and, perhaps, with its causes and its consequences; a professor of biblical literature is concerned with the form of what is written, with the exact meaning of words, and with the place and the purpose of the author. But the pastor is concerned with history only as it discloses or illustrates the purpose of God or disciplines men; and he is concerned with biblical literature only as it instructs and inspires men in righteousness.

The professor is a specialist, a student of one subject, a scientist whose interest is mainly in the truth in itself. The pastor is not a specialist, except in a broad way; he is a student of many subjects; he is a practical man whose interest is in the relation of truth to life or more exactly in the relation of life to life, the life of God to the life of men.

The pastor is an ambassador with a commission, a herald with a message, a physician with a remedy for the ills of mankind. In addition to this, he is a servant of men, a companion, a counselor, a comforter, as men may need his services.

When it is demanded or expected that the pastor shall be an authority on ancient history, a critic of biblical literature, a teacher of many subjects, and an expert in solving the practical problems of modern society, the impossible is asked of him. Moreover, these are not the things which he is set to do. His study is not the same as the scholar's library; his church is not a classroom; his audience is not a group of students; his sermon is not a lecture. His people are not generally greatly interested in either scientific or literary studies. What they feel are the temptations; what they know are the sins; what they experience are the trials; what they suffer are the sorrows of life. What they want is help.

The business of the pastor is to make men think of God and put away sin and do that which is right. What they ask of him is that he should direct them in their duties, hearten them to meet their trials, comfort them in their sorrows, and inspire them with immortal hope. These things can never be done by the methods of the classroom.

That a pastor should have an intelligent knowledge of the subjects on which he speaks and a clear comprehension of the results of the best scholarship in relation to the facts of biblical literature and Christian doctrine is admitted. But to possess this it is unnecessary for the pastor continually to be reading new books. Not the number but the kind of books is important. The facts can easily be obtained. The various discussions of the facts fill libraries and would stultify the mind of any pastor.

One does not need to read very widely to know what is taught by modern scholars in respect to the composition of the books of the Bible, and the extremely conservative view is very simple. But the pastor is concerned with the use of the Bible and not much with its composition. A botanist knows much about the growth and the form of wheat in all its stages and it will do a baker no harm to have the same knowledge; but what a baker must have is flour and what he must know is how to make bread for hungry customers. That Maine fisherman who thought that Professor Biddle, whom he saw in summer, was a great man because "he has reversed the Bible," and my summer neighbor who told me the preachers in his town had worked out the meaning of the Bible "by algebra" were not greatly benefited by what had been done.

A knowledge of the human element and the time element in the Bible is of great value, and with a few words a pastor may remove difficulties from the minds of some of his hearers. But besides this, in a homiletical way, whether a man is conservative or progressive does not make the practical difference which

some suppose. There are preachers today beyond middle life who began with the theory of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, and who now believe in inspiration of spirit, not of words, and in the composite authorship and errancy of many books of the Bible, but whose preaching has changed but little. Whether they hold to the literal historicity of the first chapters of Genesis or to their poetical and pictorial nature, what they preach from those chapters is that God created heaven and earth, that man is a responsible agent, that when a man departs from God and yields to the guidance of any lust sin begins, and that death follows sin as a man's shadow follows the man.

Whatever a man may believe in respect to the authorship of Isaiah, in preaching he must declare the holiness of God, and call upon men to make themselves clean, to put away evil and learn to do well, and he must comfort the people

of God whose trust is in him. From the New Testament he will declare that Jesus is the Christ, the supreme revelation of God, the Redeemer and Ruler of men, and the source of the world's renovation. He will "preach the word; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."

Apart from such reading as he may pursue for such general culture and knowledge as he should possess, the studies of a pastor must be in spirit, method, and scope inspirational, and in purpose homiletical. A perusal of the sermons of such preachers as Robertson, Beecher, and Brooks, none of whom was narrow, will discover this quality and method of their mind. And the greatest preachers of today are of the same habit.

The pastor who thus limits himself and does one thing well will prove to be a servant of Christ and through the blessing of the Spirit a savior of men.

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## THE REALITY OF RELIGION

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The student of history impressed with the changes that have occurred and are still occurring in religious thought is led to raise the questions: Why this eternal flux? Is there anywhere an abiding core underlying it? When these questions arise it is no longer possible to appeal to external authority for arbitration, for such authority is but a

temporary crystallization in the ever-changing process of experience, which in turn must yield to dissolution. The observation, also, that the imagination is very active in the construction of religious belief makes it comparatively easy to understand why some men have their doubts of ever finding a foundation of reality in the realm of religious thought.